

**General Assembly**

Distr.: General
15 November 2011

Original: English

Sixty-sixth session

Agenda item 70 (a)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 13 December 2011 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, by which the Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund was established to advise me on the use and impact of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of that resolution, I have the honour to transmit herewith a note on the meeting of the Advisory Group which was held in New York on 26 and 27 October 2011.

As summarized in the note, the Advisory Group recognized continuing improvements in the performance and management of the Fund. The Group welcomed the positive findings of the five-year evaluation of the Fund. It noted that the evaluation highlighted some general inefficiencies in the humanitarian system and the need to enhance responsibility for collective results at the country level. The Advisory Group endorsed the evaluation recommendation that the CERF loan fund should be reduced to US\$ 30 million and the balance transferred to the grant window, and asked the Fund secretariat to keep it informed of General Assembly discussions in that regard. The Group also considered a number of policy issues, including the timeliness of CERF-funded activities, the quality of reporting on results and the potential role of CERF in funding preparedness activities. The Advisory Group met with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to discuss the effectiveness of CERF support to humanitarian interventions.

(Signed) **BAN Ki-moon**

Annex**Note to the Secretary-General on the meeting of the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group, held on 26 and 27 October 2011****Recommendations and conclusions**

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Advisory Group's second meeting for 2011 was held in New York on 26 and 27 October, with 16 members, including the six newly selected members, participating. The Chair of the Advisory Group, Mikael Lindvall (Sweden), presided over the meeting.
2. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator provided an update on the use and management of the Fund since the Advisory Group's previous meeting, in April 2011. She presented the results of the General Assembly-mandated five-year evaluation of the Fund, and the management response plan developed in response to the evaluation. Additionally, the Group discussed the key findings of the four country studies conducted under the performance and accountability framework. The Group considered a number of policy issues, including the timeliness of Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)-funded activities, the quality of reporting on results, and the potential role of CERF in funding preparedness activities. In accordance with past practice, the Advisory Group met with partners from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to discuss the effectiveness of CERF support to humanitarian interventions.
3. Following those discussions, the Group would like to offer the following findings and recommendations.

Five-year evaluation

4. The Advisory Group reviewed the findings of the five-year evaluation of CERF and the management response plan. The Group stated that the findings of the evaluation should serve to inform improvements in the effectiveness and the accountability of CERF and of recipient agencies. The Group also noted that the evaluation had highlighted some general inefficiencies in the humanitarian system, and the need to enhance responsibility for collective results at the country level.
5. The Advisory Group endorsed the five-year evaluation recommendation that the CERF loan fund should be reduced to US\$ 30 million and the balance transferred to the grant window, and asked the CERF secretariat to keep it informed of the General Assembly's progress in that regard.
6. The Advisory Group asked that the CERF secretariat continue to encourage independent evaluations and reviews of CERF-funded activities by recipient United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), along the lines of the evaluation by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations of its use of CERF funds, and requested the United Nations agencies and IOM to conduct similar independent evaluations or reviews of CERF-funded interventions.

7. The Advisory Group agreed to revisit and continue monitoring the progress of implementation of the management response plan at its subsequent meetings.

Management

8. The Advisory Group thanked the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the CERF secretariat for their continued professional management of the Fund and their continuing efforts to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. The Group commended the efforts to reach the target of US\$ 450 million in annual funding set by the General Assembly. The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation of the secretariat's efforts to broaden and deepen the financial support for the Fund of Member States and the private sector, despite the difficult global economic circumstances.

9. Members of the Advisory Group acknowledged the role of the Fund in complementing and reinforcing humanitarian reform when there was effective leadership from the humanitarian country team and solid coordination arrangements were in place. The Group noted the importance of clarifying the accountability of the resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator in the planning, coordination and use of CERF resources; it looked to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to address those issues.

10. The Advisory Group acknowledged the effort made by the CERF secretariat to improve the quality and timeliness of field reporting over the past five years and the special attention given to working with resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators who had provided substandard draft reports. The Group expressed concern for the overall quality of reporting by resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators on country-level results, and stressed the need to move towards improved measurement of outcome. The Group acknowledged the need to improve reporting across the humanitarian system and beyond the Fund, and suggested that the improvements to CERF reporting could facilitate improvements at all levels. Particular mention was made of the need to work with United Nations agencies and IOM at the country level to better integrate monitoring and reporting frameworks. The Group requested the Emergency Relief Coordinator to work with the principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to improve narrative reporting on and monitoring of the use of CERF funds.

11. The Advisory Group praised the efforts made by the CERF secretariat to continuously and systematically reduce the time needed to allocate and disburse funds to recipient United Nations agencies, but, as at previous meetings, expressed serious concern about the pace of disbursement from recipient United Nations agencies to implementing partners. Acknowledging the possible difficulty of determining what proportion of funds were allocated to implementing partners, the Group requested that the CERF secretariat continue working with United Nations agencies and IOM to better measure the speed at which those funds were disbursed to their implementing partners. The Group also asked the secretariat to approach non-governmental organization implementing partners to collect data on the timeliness of disbursements of funds by United Nations agencies and IOM. The Advisory Group requested further reporting on the timeliness of agency disbursements and asked that the CERF secretariat disseminate good practices in that regard, with a view to making urgent progress on that crucial issue.

12. On the question of programme support costs and subcontracting arrangements, the Advisory Group requested further information on the calculation of programme support costs by recipient agencies and implementing partners.

13. The Advisory Group requested the secretariat to provide further analysis on allocations to chronic conflict situations, particularly those which had been consistent recipients of funds, for a number of years, from the underfunded window, and on allocations for internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly those in camp situations.

14. The Advisory Group discussed the possible role of CERF in supporting disaster preparedness. While acknowledging the system-wide gaps in the financing and coordination of emergency preparedness, the Group expressed caution regarding the possible expansion of the mandate of CERF, stressing that the Fund worked well partly because it had a clear and simple mandate. As the question of preparedness is currently under discussion by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Advisory Group requested that it be kept updated on the progress of those discussions during 2012.

15. On the issue of funding for protection, the Advisory Group reviewed CERF practice and reiterated that CERF should continue to fund protection activities that fit within the life-saving criteria.

Performance and accountability framework

16. The Advisory Group welcomed the findings and recommendations of the independent country reviews of the value-added of CERF in Bolivia, Colombia, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The Advisory Group reiterated its support for the performance and accountability framework country reviews as an instrument to review activities at the country level and distil good practices and lessons learned. The Group looked forward to further analysis of the contribution of CERF in the context of the ongoing crisis in the Horn of Africa, which would be provided in 2012 country reviews. Furthermore, the Group endorsed the secretariat's proposal to review the performance and accountability framework in 2012.

Administrative matters

17. The Advisory Group agreed to hold its next meeting in Geneva in 2012 and that the next meeting would primarily be used to discuss and review progress in the implementation of the management response matrix for the five-year evaluation, the performance and accountability framework, and issues related to the timeliness of programme implementation and the quality of reporting.